

# Lesson Plan 5: Do-it-yourself Utopia

**SUBJECT(S):** Economics, Geography,  
Social Studies, English

**GRADE LEVEL:** 7 - 10

**DURATION:** three class periods  
(with homework, if necessary)

## Objectives

In this culminating activity, students create an ideal community by using the concepts and skills they have learned in previous chapters.

## Warm-up/Discussion

### Period 1

Explain that students will have a chance to design a community that incorporates the concepts that they've been learning about in previous activities. The only requirement is that they use the guidelines in the *Guidelines for Community Planning* (pg. 198) handout to create their design. The *Adam Smith's Invisible Hand Drops the Ball* (pg. 193) handout can be used to talk about the implications of alternative choices about land use.

## Learning Activities

Divide students into groups of five and tell them that their job is to design a new community. Depending on where your school is located, describe the setting for the new community. For example, if your school is in the city, you may want to suggest that the new community will be five city blocks square. If you are in an outer suburb, the new community might be on undeveloped land in an area that is familiar to students.

Have students choose (or draw slips of paper) so that one person is assigned to fill each of the following roles:

**Transportation planner:** considers the impact of land use on traffic and makes sure that alternative transportation options are available

## MATERIALS INCLUDED:

- Guidelines for Community Planning [pg. 198]

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Poster board or large sheets of plain paper
- markers
- construction paper
- string and any other materials students would like to use to represent their ideal community graphically

## VOCABULARY

### utopia:

*a perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects*

## Learning Activities (cont'd)

**Environmental consultant:** pays attention to the impact of the design on natural resources

**Economic development director:** makes sure that the community has businesses to provide tax revenue and jobs

**Housing commissioner:** ensures that there is a range of housing types and prices

**Recorder:** keeps a record of ideas generated in the brainstorming session and reminds the group of ideas they wanted to incorporate

**Director of Fun:** makes sure that there are interesting things to do so that life in the community doesn't get boring

Students spend the first class period in their groups discussing their ideas for the community. They should use the *Guidelines for Community Planning* (pg. 198) handout to guide their design. Tell them that their work will be evaluated in terms of how it incorporated these principles and on the basis of creativity.

Suggest that students begin by laying out the basic framework of transportation, such as major roads and railroad tracks, using string so that the road can be changed as they add other features. They can add any large buildings, such as office and/or industrial buildings, as well as retail stores, government and religious buildings and schools. Then add housing of different types, such as single and multi-unit buildings, and consider how to incorporate parks or forest preserves into the design.

## Assessment

Evaluation of student-created communities should focus on how well the final design incorporates the principles in the *Guidelines for Community Planning* (pg. 198) handout.

## Wrap-up/Reflection

What have we learned? Have students talk about the process of designing the community: Were there disagreements among members of their group? If so, how were these resolved? Have students try to imagine what a day would be like in one of the communities (other than the one they helped designed). Is this a place where they would like to live? Why or why not? If students were designing their own idea of a perfect community without reference to the guidelines they used for this activity, how would their community be different?

## Ideas for Additional Activities

**English:** students can read excerpts from famous literary utopias, including Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia* and Butler's *Erewhon*.

## **Ideas for Additional Activities (cont'd)**

Students can do research on attempts in the Chicago region to create perfect communities. For example, the community of Zion, Illinois, was established in 1900 as a theocracy, and attracted immigrants from many countries in the early twentieth century. Riverside, Illinois was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and incorporated in 1869 to establish “a perfect village in a perfect setting.” The Pullman community was carefully planned to house the families of workers who built railroad cars.

### **Activities based on Terry Evans photographs for the Revealing Chicago Exhibition included in the back of the binder:**

**FARM IN THE BACKYARD. NEAR THE BORDER OF WILL AND COOK COUNTIES. SEPTEMBER 17, 2003.**

The photograph illustrates a suburban land pattern in which farmland is sold to developers for subdivisions. Write an essay about the various interests of people who would be affected by this process such as the farm family, the developer, local bankers who lend money to the developer, other farm families nearby, local business people, students in the local school, superintendents and teachers in the school, and people who move into the new houses.

**MILLENNIUM PARK, OPENING NIGHT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO. JULY 16, 2004. and SIX FLAGS GREAT AMERICA. GURNEE, LAKE COUNTY. MAY 21, 2003. and BURNHAM SKATE PARK. LAKE SHORE DRIVE AT 31ST STREET. CHICAGO. JULY 24, 2003.**

Millennium Park and Great America have scheduled events and other things to do, such as concerts in Millennium Park and rides at Great America, but most of the things that happen in these places happen as people interact with one another. What social functions do these places serve? For example, families spend time together at Great America and a couple might go on a date to see an exhibit at Millennium Park.

**BUNGALOWS. CHICAGO'S SOUTHWEST SIDE, JUST WEST OF MIDWAY AIRPORT. MAY 12, 2003 and BACKYARD POOLS. FRANKFORT SQUARE, WILL COUNTY. SEPTEMBER 17, 2003**

You hear people talking about “community” as if everyone one agrees on a single definition of the word. But community means different things to different people. Write a paragraph that defines what community means to you and give an example (either real or imagined) of community.

## Guidelines for Community Planning\*

- 1) Mix land uses:** New, clustered development works best if it includes a mix of stores, jobs and homes. Single-use districts make life less convenient and require more driving.
- 2) Create a range of housing opportunities and choices:** Not everyone wants the same thing. Communities should offer a range of options: houses, condominiums, affordable homes for low income families, and “granny flats” and “accessory apartments” for empty nesters and young people.
- 3) Foster “walkable,” close-knit neighborhoods:** These places offer not just the opportunity to walk, but something to walk to, whether it’s the corner store, the transit stop or a school. A compact, walkable neighborhood contributes to peoples’ sense of community because neighbors get to know each other, not just each other’s cars.
- 4) Preserve open space and critical environmental areas:** People want to stay connected to nature and are willing to take action to protect farms, waterways, ecosystems and wildlife.
- 5) Provide a variety of transportation choices:** People can’t get out of their cars unless we provide them with another way to get where they’re going. Communities need safe and reliable public transportation, sidewalks, and bike and walking paths.
- 6) Create places where “community” can happen:** Make sure that there are public places where anyone is welcome and can get together with friends and neighbors.

*\*adapted from Smart Growth America guidelines (<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.com>)*